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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

277th meeting

Monday, 9 April 2007, 10 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Rosselli ..... (Uruguay)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the 2007 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

We are joined today by the Secretary-General, who will address the Commission in a few minutes. I believe that his presence here should be underscored, given that he has devoted a great deal of time to the issue of disarmament as a priority in the context of his mandate. I believe that I speak for all representatives in saying that we are honoured by his presence.

It is a great honour for me to serve as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. I will carry out the duties entrusted to me in an impartial manner, and I will endeavour to help delegations hold a substantive debate that will enable the Commission to make a significant contribution with respect to an issue on which no major advances have been made for far too long.

This session is the first truly multilateral undertaking in the area of disarmament in 2007. It is also the first disarmament undertaking under the mandate of our Secretary-General, and the first since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 61/257 on "Strengthening of the capacity of the Organization to advance the disarmament agenda". We all are aware that the Secretary-General has placed particular emphasis on this issue and that the General Assembly has given its full support to his proposal to establish an Office of Disarmament Affairs and to appoint a High Representative to head that Office.

In the year that has elapsed since the 2006 substantive session, there has been no reduction in the number of weapons in the world, nuclear or conventional. Nor do fewer States possess nuclear weapons; in fact, more do. In short, there has been no disarmament; rather, there has been proliferation.

Our Commission has a deliberative mandate, and, as a result, it is not a forum for negotiations. However, as it is a deliberative body, it was able, in the 1990s, to contribute significantly in terms of guidelines relating to on objectives in the military sphere, approaches to regional disarmament, international arms transfers, the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and conventional arms control.

Our Commission, like any other multilateral body, cannot go beyond the collective will of its members. The Commission itself, as a deliberative body, is only as good or as limited as its members wish it to be. It can be as useful as its members want to make it, and, as a result, members must take up the challenge of seeking agreement. I trust that representatives will make every effort to find, by means of debate, areas on which we can reach consensus. We must ensure that this year's work lays down a more solid foundation upon which we can build in order to achieve the desired results by next year, at the end of our three-year cycle.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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I pledge that, as Chairman, I will make every effort to succeed. But the task does not fall exclusively on my shoulders; rather, I share it with all representatives.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: I am delighted to address the Disarmament Commission as it begins its 2007 session. Let me congratulate you, Ambassador Rosselli, on your appointment as Commission Chairman. Let me also express my gratitude to the outgoing Chairman, my former colleague Ambassador Oh Joon, for his successful efforts to advance the work of the Commission during 2006.

The dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction and by the excessive accumulation of conventional weapons are well known. That makes our limited progress in addressing these concerns all the more disappointing. The failure of the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament, and the disappointing outcome of the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference all point to a disheartening trend. Unfortunately, we seem to be in a rut where setbacks in the field of disarmament have become the norm, not the exception.

This situation is unacceptable. Addressing it demands renewed multilateral attention, understanding and cooperation. The threat of weapons of mass destruction and the daily suffering inflicted by small arms and light weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions have to give us pause. This should prompt a re-examination of the foundations of our international security regime. Such a review has to be inclusive, and it must seek to strengthen existing treaties on disarmament and non-proliferation. In today's world, only a collective, multilateral approach can effectively eliminate the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and check the spread of conventional weapons.

From my first day in office, revitalizing the international disarmament agenda, as well as the effectiveness of the United Nations in this area, has been a personal priority. That is why I proposed a new Office for Disarmament Affairs, led by a new High Representative, which would better mobilize the political will necessary to overcome the current stalemate and re-energize action on both disarmament and non-proliferation. I was gratified by the General Assembly's broad support for my proposals, and I will soon be appointing the High Representative.

Given these ongoing changes, this session of the Disarmament Commission is particularly timely and important. I remain hopeful that the Commission's discussions will reinforce the gathering momentum and prove to be a source of new and far-reaching ideas.

I am encouraged that the Commission's agenda includes nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As representatives all know, the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference is approaching. The Commission can play an important role in setting the stage for this Review Conference. It can seek a consensus on the steps necessary to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Its deliberations can also consider measures that help ensure the continuing relevance and strength of the NPT, and its universal membership can serve as an important complement to the NPT review process itself.

As the Commission works on those important issues, let me assure members that I intend to spare no effort in advancing those same goals. I hope that all United Nations Member States will also join me in that endeavour.

Of course, the Commission's work on conventional weapons is no less important. While nuclear weapons threaten us with mass destruction, on a cumulative basis conventional weapons wreak tremendous death and destruction every day in conflicts across the globe. It is therefore vital to encourage responsible conduct in conventional weapons transfers. We must also explore ways to lessen the pressure on States to engage in conventional weaponry build-ups, while safeguarding the legitimate right to self-defence of all Member States.

I look to this Commission for the ideas and leadership that can help reinvigorate the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda. I am confident that all members will rise to that challenge. As they work to do so, let me assure them of the full cooperation and support of the Office for Disarmament. Its staff, and their colleagues from the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, will continue to provide the Commission with whatever assistance it may seek. In that spirit I wish the Commission a

successful and productive session, and I eagerly await the outcome of its deliberations.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): The agenda for this session is contained in document A/CN.10/L.59.

Members of the Commission will recall that, at our organizational meeting of 6 December 2006, the Commission officially adopted the provisional agenda so that it would not have to adopt a measure to that effect at the current session, but could simply take note of document A/CN.10/L.59.

It was so decided.

Election of the remaining officers

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): As members will recall, the Commission is still to elect the Rapporteur, a Vice-Chairman from the Group of Asian States and two Vice-Chairmen from the Group of African States.

I want to inform the Commission that the Group of African States has successfully completed its nominating process and we now have both candidates for the two posts of Vice-Chairmen. The Group has nominated Mr. Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou of Benin and Mr. Raff Bukun-olu Wole Onemola of Nigeria.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou and Mr. Raff Bukun-olu Wole Onemola as Vice-Chairmen.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I have also been informed that the Group of Asian States has nominated Mr. Mohsen Naziri of the Islamic Republic of Iran as Vice-Chairman of the Commission and Mr. Bassam Darwish of the Syrian Arab Republic as Rapporteur.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Mohsen Naziri as Vice-Chairman and Mr. Bassam Darwish as Rapporteur.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Mr. Bassam Darwish to take his place on the podium in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission.

Allow me on behalf of the Commission and the members of the Bureau to warmly congratulate the newly elected members of the Bureau and to wish them success in discharging their duties. I am convinced that they will make an important contribution to the smooth work of the Commission this year. On a more personal note, I would like to mention that I shall count on their support and counsel.

Organization of work

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me on behalf of the Bureau to make some general observations on our future work.

Members will recall that some issues concerning the work within the working groups were already discussed and settled at our Organizational session. Here, I wish to say a few words about the general debate in the plenary meetings.

Last year, the General Assembly decided to encourage the Disarmament Commission to invite to its debates, as appropriate, outside experts on disarmament. On the basis of that recommendation, the Bureau carefully considered the possibility of inviting experts for this year's session. Taking into consideration the principles of balanced geographical distribution and representation of all major schools of thought on two complex disarmament issues, as well as financial and organizational aspects, we came to the conclusion that it was necessary to consult further with the Commission on specific organizational and substantive aspects. We in the Bureau expect members to guide and assist us in arriving at the right decisions.

Let me refer to some of those. First, we must decide within which format — be it plenary or working group — we should invite the experts to speak. Since the meetings of working groups are traditionally closed, the Commission, as the master of its own procedures, has to take a decision that will constitute a major departure from the existing practice should we decide to open the meetings of working groups to the experts. If, on the other hand, the experts will be speaking within the plenary, no changes will be required.

Secondly, the format of plenary meetings has to be agreed upon. We have a number of options. We

could continue with statements on all disarmament matters within the general debate, or we could instead hold a structured thematic discussion that focuses on the two items under consideration. Another option would be to combine those two approaches, dividing the general debate into two distinct phases, one consisting of general statements, and the other being a structured thematic discussion.

Thirdly, during our consultations in the Bureau we considered, at the request of member States, the issue of the more active and direct participation of non-governmental organizations, although the issue is not included in the agreed recommendations. Once again, we concluded that there are no simple solutions and that we require further guidance from the membership of the Commission.

We believe that further consultations on these and other issues are needed in the course of the 2007 session before we can decide to adopt any changes. I therefore intend to seek the opinions and advice of the membership over the coming days.

General exchange of views

Mr. Brasack (Germany): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the stabilization and association process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

As this is the first time that I have taken the floor at this session, please allow me to extend congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2007 session, as well as to all the members of the Bureau. The EU looks forward to working closely with you to achieve, under your able guidance, a successful outcome to our discussions on the two agenda items.

The EU looks forward to constructive discussions and will do its utmost to achieve consensus on concrete recommendations to the General Assembly at its next session. Our objective is to agree on recommendations for achieving the objectives of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. It is the EU's belief that at this stage of our work, the holding of the debate still has priority over the production of documents if we want consensus to emerge. We would like to ask the Chairmen of Working Groups I and II to consider the points raised by the EU in the further work of the Working Groups.

The EU stresses the need for general and complete disarmament. Non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control remain indispensable elements of cooperative security among States. There is broad agreement that the security of the international community continues to be challenged, both globally and regionally, by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and by the risk that non-State actors could gain access to those weapons. The discovery of clandestine nuclear activities is of particular concern.

It is thus of the utmost importance that all existing disarmament and non-proliferation agreements are effectively resourced, implemented and fully complied with. The EU believes that the prevention of nuclear proliferation and the pursuit of nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) are essential for global peace and security. The NPT provides the essential multilateral norm and the basis for all of our endeavours to address security challenges in the nuclear field. It is based on three mutually reinforcing pillars: non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In view of current proliferation risks, we are convinced that the NPT today is more important than ever; its authority and integrity must be preserved and strengthened. To this end, the EU will continue to promote all the objectives laid down in the Treaty.

Our conviction, as expressed in the EU's Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), is that a multilateral approach to non-proliferation provides the best means of countering the threat to international peace and security resulting from the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery. We therefore regret that the 2005 NPT Review Conference was unable to agree on a substantive final document to address the most pressing challenges to the Treaty. From this perspective, it is even more important that all States parties work together to meet the challenges of the

NPT and have an open and inclusive discussion in the run-up to the Review Conference of 2010. The EU will continue to work towards universal accession to the NPT, calling on all States not party to the Treaty to undertake a commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament and to become States parties to the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon States.

We are committed to making a constructive contribution to the NPT review process, which will start with the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee at the end of this month and lead up to the Review Conference in 2010. In this regard, the EU continues to support the decisions and the resolution adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference and the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, and will bear in mind the current situation. We note also that the final report, which includes the programme of work adopted by consensus at the 2005 NPT Review Conference, constitutes a reference for the upcoming review process, in which the EU will engage on the basis of its Common Position adopted prior to the 2005 Review Conference.

We recognize that serious nuclear proliferation events have occurred since the end of the 2000 Review Conference. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is as essential to nuclear disarmament as it is to non-proliferation. The occurrence of nuclear tests after the CTBT was opened for signature underlines the need for the Treaty's entry into force as early as possible. The EU reiterates its call on States, particularly those listed in annex II, to sign and ratify the Treaty without delay and without conditions and — pending its entry into force — to abide by a moratorium on nuclear testing and to refrain from any action contrary to the obligations and provisions of the CTBT.

The EU would also like to express its appreciation for the substantial work done by the CTBT Organization Preparatory Commission. We will continue to actively support the work of the Special Representative of the States that have ratified the Treaty in his work promoting universal accession.

The EU is strongly committed to reaching consensus on a programme of work in the Conference on Disarmament as soon as possible and welcomes the fact that new ideas and new proposals have been put forward in this regard over the past few years. The EU is encouraged by the constructive, structured and substantive discussion in the course of this year's session and by the momentum created by it. That has fostered our hope that the Conference on Disarmament can resume significant work.

The EU attaches clear priority to the negotiation at the Conference on Disarmament of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices as a means to strengthen disarmament and non-proliferation. That was made clear in the 25 April 2005 Common Position adopted by the EU relating to the NPT Review Conference, by which the Union stands.

The EU supports the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and welcomes the reductions in strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons and their delivery systems since the end of the cold war. It stresses the need for an overall reduction of global stockpiles of nuclear weapons in accordance with article VI of the NPT, in particular by those with the largest arsenals.

In this context, we recognize the application of the principle of irreversibility to guide all measures in the field of nuclear disarmament and arms control as a contribution to the maintenance and reinforcement of international peace, security and stability, taking current conditions into account. We are pursuing efforts to secure transparency as a voluntary confidence-building measure.

The European Union notes that the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which reduced the strategic nuclear weapons arsenals of the United States and Russia to 6,000 accountable warheads, is due to expire in 2009. We welcomed the ratification of the Moscow Treaty by the Russian Federation and the United States of America in 2002, while at the same time stressing the need for more progress in reducing those arsenals. We also note that the Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions, which limits each side to no more than 1,700 to 2,200 deployed strategic nuclear warheads, will expire on 31 December 2012. The EU welcomes the reductions in deployed nuclear weapons which START and the Moscow Treaty have brought about and stresses the need for more progress in structurally reducing these nuclear arsenals through appropriate follow-on processes.

The EU also highlights the importance of implementing the declarations made by the Presidents of Russia and the United States of America in 1991 and 1992 on unilateral reductions in their stocks of non-

strategic nuclear weapons, calling on all States with non-strategic nuclear weapons to include them in their general arms control and disarmament processes, with a view to their reduction and elimination. The European Union recognizes the importance, from the point of view of nuclear disarmament, of the programmes for the destruction and elimination of nuclear weapons and the elimination of fissile material as defined under the Group of Eight Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction.

Since security in Europe is linked to security in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the EU attaches particular importance to non-proliferation and disarmament issues in that region and, in this context, reiterates the urgent necessity of the universalization of the NPT and of the entry into force as early as possible of the CTBT. The EU calls again on all States in that region to make the Middle East into an effectively verifiable zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, in keeping with the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference.

A solution to the Iranian nuclear issue would contribute to global non-proliferation efforts and to realizing the objective of a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, including their means of delivery. The EU deplores Iran's failure to take the steps repeatedly required by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors and the Security Council. It welcomes the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006) and 1747 (2007).

The EU continues to attach great importance to nuclear-weapon-free-zones, established on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among States of the regions concerned, as elaborated in the guidelines adopted by the Disarmament Commission at its 1999 substantive session. Nuclear-weapon-free-zones enhance regional and global peace and security and are a means to promote nuclear disarmament, stability and confidence. We would welcome and we support the signature and ratification by the nuclear-weapon States of the relevant protocols to agreements on nuclear-weapon-free-zones following completion of the necessary consultations. We hope that outstanding issues concerning nuclear-weapon-free-zones can be resolved through full consultations in accordance with the Disarmament Commission guidelines and with the agreement of all parties involved.

The EU pays particular attention to the need to enhance the detectability of violations, as a means to reinforce compliance with obligations established by the multilateral treaty regime. To this end, particular emphasis is placed on making best use of existing verification mechanisms and, where necessary, establishing additional verification instruments. The EU supports strengthening the role of the Security Council, which has primary responsibility for safeguarding international peace and security. The EU stresses, in particular, the absolute necessity of full compliance with all the provisions of the NPT by all States parties.

The EU would like to highlight the IAEA's unique and positive role in verifying States' compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation commitments. The Union believes that the international safeguards system of the IAEA is essential to the verification of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and to the success of that multilateral system.

The European Union considers that comprehensive safeguards agreements, together with additional protocols, have a deterrent effect on nuclear proliferation, form today's verification standard and constitute the current IAEA verification standard. The EU would therefore like to reiterate its call for universal accession to the comprehensive safeguards agreements and additional protocols. EU member States are also working towards making additional protocols a condition of supply for sensitive nuclear exports.

The European Union continues to be committed to strong national and internationally coordinated export controls in order to complement our obligations under the NPT, and to support the strengthening of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The European Union urges the NSG and the Zangger Committee to share their experience on export controls with non-members in order to meet the new non-proliferation challenges arising from an increase of global trade in nuclear-related goods.

Among relevant multilateral instruments, Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) plays a crucial role in developing an effective mechanism of prevention and counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of production and

delivery to or from States and non-State actors worldwide. We commend the Security Council Committee established pursuant to Council resolution 1540 (2004) for engaging in activity in support of the resolution, and urge it to continue with ever stronger, focused outreach to those regions where implementation of the resolution is most urgent.

We appreciate the positive attitude of Member States towards the necessity of comprehensive national implementation of Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and encourage States to continue in their efforts of national implementation, consistent with the goal of Council resolution 1673 (2006): to reach compliance by 2008 through the achievement of implementation of all provisions of resolution 1540 (2004). The EU is ready to continue to provide assistance, in particular in building legal and administrative infrastructure, sharing our experience in implementation and in training national authorities.

We should not be distracted from other important tasks on the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agenda this year. These tasks are manifold and include a broad range of issues also relating to conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons.

This year the Disarmament Commission will also continue to work on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. We believe that the Chairman's perception paper of the 2003 session constitutes a good basis to build upon and to learn from previous problems. The goal of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms is to strengthen international peace and security, improve relations among States and contribute to the prevention of war. The EU hopes that at this session we will have fruitful discussions leading to concrete and comprehensive recommendations designed to make progress in strengthening confidence and security and in achieving disarmament. After years of discussion, the items should be sufficiently ripe for finalization.

Cooperative approaches to arms control will often start with confidence-building measures — CBMs. They build relations between peoples, thus contributing to post-conflict stabilization and rehabilitation. They create the climate of transparency, dialogue and cooperation that is the regular basis for arms control or disarmament agreements between the parties to a conflict, and they are often the precondition for conflict prevention. CBMs have to be developed and agreed on a voluntary basis. They are understood on the basis of the principle of cooperative security. The confidence-building process is facilitated by good governance and the rule of law. Confidence-building measures should be in full accord with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law.

It is important that all States and all regions feel that their participation in transparency and confidence-building measures serves their security interests and builds security with neighbours. Conflicts in various regions where CBMs were not initiated at an early stage have shown the need for world-wide awareness of their potential to contribute to peace and stability. That implies, inter alia, verification regimes that ensure the reliability of the information provided.

Confidence-building measures, not only bilateral but also subregional and regional, have produced encouraging results worldwide in supporting peace and stability. We need more and enhanced dialogue on confidence-building measures in order to defuse tensions in regional conflicts. A further security benefit of CBMs between States is that they build a network of Government experts who are better able to tackle transnational threats posed by non-State actors.

With regard to Europe, the OSCE area is an encouraging example of how confidence-building measures can contribute to building peace and stability on a bilateral and regional level. Since the first CBMs were agreed at the Stockholm Conference in the mid-1980s, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the Open Skies Treaty and the successive Vienna Documents have been instrumental in the creation of an open military culture to enhance transparency, confidence and trust. These documents, along with additional documents of the OSCE acquis, constitute a mutually reinforcing network for security in Europe and are fully supported by the European Union.

One important part of the OSCE acquis on CBMs is the document "Stabilising Measures for Localised Crisis Situations", adopted by the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation in November 1993, which is intended to facilitate decision-making in localized crisis situations through the use of CBMs. The OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security stipulates, inter alia, that all armed forces

must be under effective democratic and constitutional control and have clearly defined tasks. The EU expresses the hope that the Disarmament Commission will endorse these principles in its recommendations.

The establishment of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms constituted on the global level a significant and lasting step towards the promotion of transparency in military matters. In its 15 years of existence the Register has proven to be an effective international transparency- and confidence-building mechanism, which is under continuing review and development.

A recent development of the Register is the newly adopted standardized form for small arms and light weapons notifications. The EU stresses the practical importance of including information on small arms and light weapons in Member States' annual report to the Register, using this form. The EU is committed to securing the widest possible participation in the Register and to improving its relevance and effectiveness in a way that continues to contribute to regional and subregional confidence-building efforts.

The same commitment is valid for the mechanism on "Objective information on military measures, including transparency of military expenditure". Transparency in military expenditure is an essential element of confidence between States and can thus help to relieve tension and contribute to conflict prevention. Measures directed towards strengthening and broadening participation should be developed.

Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects is a priority for the EU. By focusing, inter alia, on marking and tracing, brokering, transfer control criteria, stockpile management and the issue of ammunition, due process for small arms and light weapons and their ammunition is established. This work leads to transparency and thus contributes to building confidence. The European strategy on small arms and light weapons and their ammunition, adopted on 15 December 2005, formalized the Union's existing approach to small arms and light weapons. It is a strategy with a global scope, encompassing technical and financial assistance to a wide range of programmes and projects related to small arms and light weapons and their ammunition.

The EU's Code of Conduct on Arms Exports adopted in 1998 has introduced a high degree of transparency in arms transactions, not only through building upon common criteria for arms exports, but also through the establishment of an information exchange and consultation mechanism. The EU also continues to attach great importance to the efforts of the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies. Those efforts include promoting responsible export policies towards, and effective export controls over, small arms and light weapons, including man-portable air defence systems — MANPADS — in order to prevent their uncontrolled proliferation, destabilizing accumulation and diversion. Such practices have, the EU believes, established the gold standard for such controls.

The EU firmly supports the elaboration of a comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms within the framework of the United Nations. The EU and its individual member States are committed to playing an active role in this process.

The EU calls on all United Nations Member States actively to support the arms trade treaty process, to submit their views to the Secretary-General, and to participate in the work of the group of government experts. The EU firmly believes that such an instrument, consistent with existing responsibilities of States under relevant international law, would be a major contribution to tackling the undesirable and irresponsible proliferation of conventional arms, which undermines peace, security, development and full respect for human rights.

The EU is concerned about the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions. We consider that this should be a vital element in the future work of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW). Against that background, the EU will make every effort to achieve substantive results on that important issue at the forthcoming CCW meetings in order to enhance the protection of the civilian population against the humanitarian hazards caused by cluster munitions.

I would like to reiterate the EU's support for the full implementation and universalization of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We welcome the progress so far achieved. We call upon all States that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible. That is necessary to achieve our goal that there should be no more anti-personnel mine victims.

Mr. Lara-Peña (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for our delegation to speak in this general debate on behalf of the countries members of the Rio Group: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and my country, the Dominican Republic.

First, the Rio Group congratulates you, Sir, on your election to preside over the 2007 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Likewise, we would like to thank the Chairmen of Working Groups I and II, Mr. Jean-Francis Zinsou of Benin and Mr. Carlos Duarte of Brazil, for their ongoing efforts to bring to fruition their assigned duties, and we look forward to the successful conclusion of their work.

The Rio Group also thanks the Secretary-General for his presence today, which demonstrates his commitment to the disarmament agenda.

The Rio Group notes with concern that there has been a lack of sufficient political will to reach substantive agreements on the topic of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. That lack of political will is hard to justify, given the threat represented by the existence of such weapons.

The Rio Group, whose members form part of the first nuclear-weapon-free zone, established over 40 years ago, calls on nuclear-weapon States to offer clear signals of their commitment to progressing in the reduction of their arsenals, stressing the responsibility of those States in the implementation of disarmament and non-proliferation measures. We also reiterate the call of the states Parties to the Treaty of Tlatelolco on the nuclear-weapon States to withdraw the interpretative statements made when they acceded to the Protocols of the aforementioned hemispheric Treaty.

The Rio Group reiterates its solidarity with the other nuclear-weapon-free zones and urges the establishment of more such zones in other regions of the world.

The Rio Group reaffirms its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime — favours its universality, and calls on States that have not done so to adhere to that important instrument as non-nuclear-weapon States. We also reaffirm our commitment to the legal advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

We also believe that the states Parties should accept the integrity of the NPT, without interpreting or implementing it in a selective manner. In that regard, the right of States to the study, production and peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to receive exchanges of material, equipment and scientific information and technology for such purposes, in the context of international law and in conformity with the obligations contracted with the International Atomic Energy Agency, should be respected.

The Rio Group attaches importance to compliance with the 13 practical steps agreed upon at the 2000 Review Conference, as well as to the strengthening of negative security assurances against the possible use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. At the same time, we emphatically call for the priority conclusion of a universal and legally binding instrument on negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. Such an instrument — which, more than any other measure, would provide a legal framework — would guarantee the decline of horizontal proliferation, making it unjustifiable and illegitimate.

The Rio Group also favours the prompt initiation of negotiations without preconditions on an international treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, to include an international verification regime. In that spirit, the Rio Group cannot fail to express its concern regarding signs of an arms race in outer space.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty plays an important role in the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The Rio Group supports its prompt entry into force, which would significantly

contribute to a systematic and progressive reduction of nuclear weapons and to preventing the perfection of new types of such weapons. The Rio Group salutes the efforts undertaken by the Provisional Technical Secretariat with a view to the prompt ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, in particular in the case of those countries that have difficulties with regard to its ratification, despite sharing the letter and spirit of the instrument.

The Rio Group considers that the adoption of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms contributes to the enhancement of international peace and security, which promotes understanding, transparency and cooperation among States. That is why it is necessary to strengthen, enhance and broaden confidence-building measures at all levels, as in the cases of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, in All Its Aspects; the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms; and the United Nations System for the Standardized Reporting of Military Expenditures, which are examples of important measures developed at the United Nations.

The Rio Group attaches particular importance to the issue of ammunition. We feel it appropriate to deal with that particular issue within the United Nations, while acknowledging that the problematic issues related to small arms and light weapons are intrinsically linked to ammunition.

The Rio Group also expresses its concern over the lack of political commitment on the part of some States to preventing the proliferation of conventional weapons, including those that have excessively cruel and indiscriminate effects. In that regard, we salute the initiative of some countries to begin negotiations to regulate the use of cluster munitions and hope that the exercise will culminate with the adoption of a legally binding instrument that will strengthen the international humanitarian law regime.

The Rio Group also considers it important that the issue related to international norms on the import, export and transfer of conventional arms be duly discussed. We encourage States to present their opinions to the Secretary-General with a view to facilitating the presentation of his report on the issue to the General Assembly.

To conclude, the Rio Group stands ready to cooperate with you, Sir, with a view to significantly advancing towards concrete results at this session. We reiterate our confidence in your leadership to achieve that objective.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment to guide the work of the Commission at this session. We are especially pleased to see a Latin American diplomat presiding over our work. I am lucky enough to be an old friend of yours and to appreciate your professional qualities. A few days ago in Buenos Aires, I was pleased to preside over a meeting devoted to disarmament issues, comprised of representatives of the Common Market of the South and associated States. We are therefore very gratified that it is precisely a member of the Common Market which is leading our deliberations. Through you, Sir, I also congratulate the two Vice-Chairmen of the Working Groups, wish you success in that task, and assure you of my delegation's full cooperation to that end.

This morning, we heard an important message from the Secretary-General. I hope that his words will serve as a matter for consideration. I was impressed by his specific emphasis on the fact that the paralysis affecting disarmament negotiations is absolutely unacceptable. I hope that our Commission will take note of that emphasis and that the Conference on Disarmament will do the same in May.

I would also like to express my delegation's full support for the statement made by the representative of the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Rio Group, which includes principles that are fundamental to Argentina's position on nuclear disarmament and confidence-building measures.

The Argentine Republic is convinced that there is still an opportunity to revitalize the existing disarmament organs. In recent years, we have witnessed the poor outcome of the tasks which, as Member States, we have assigned ourselves in response to the challenges to international peace and security. However, those recent experiences should not discourage us from the ongoing effort to strengthen multilateralism, and in particular to enhance the United Nations as an effective tool for meeting those challenges and creating a safer world for our citizens.

In that regard, we welcome the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 61/257, which created the post of High Representative on disarmament and the Office for Disarmament Affairs. The Secretary-General reaffirmed our endorsement today. We are also convinced that the Secretariat reorganization will contribute to consolidating the commitment of the Organization to giving priority to the issue of disarmament.

Recent sessions of the Disarmament Commission have been a clear example of the paralysis that the disarmament organs are facing. As a universal deliberative organ, it has demonstrated the ongoing difficulty of revitalizing political will and turning it into effective recommendations to be implemented at the global, regional and domestic levels. The current session is an additional opportunity to continue working in the second year of the cycle of three devoted to considering issues on the agenda for nuclear disarmament and confidence-building measures. We have enough material in the two working groups to provide a good basis for achieving better results at this session.

Traditionally, Argentina has prioritized the issue of nuclear disarmament and taken important steps to that end on the issue at the national, bilateral, regional and global levels. Since the adoption of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the Latin American and Caribbean region has been a pioneer in the search for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Forty years after its entry into force, I wish to renew my country's commitment to achieving general and complete disarmament. That is why, as a country belonging to a highly populated nuclear-weapon-free zone, I reiterate the call upon nuclear-weapon States to renew their efforts to fulfil the objectives put forward in article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which continues to be the cornerstone of the regime on disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

At the same time, and taking into account that some States members of the Commission have not yet adhered to the instrument, we urge them to reconsider that decision and to join the regime as non-nuclear-weapon States.

I wish to express my deep concern about the lack of implementation of the 13 practical steps recommended in the final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Unfortunately, the same measures we agreed upon seven years ago are still relevant, despite the fact that they have hardly been applied.

In that regard, it remains discouraging that the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to adopt a working programme and, in particular, that no negotiations have been initiated on an international instrument to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. We hope the proposals that have been circulated recently will ultimately contribute to an initiation of substantive negotiations next May. It is also discouraging to note the lack of political will towards the speedy entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Let me point out that the challenges we face in the field of nuclear-weapons proliferation would be effectively addressed if the nuclear-weapon States were to show their determination to completely eliminating those weapons. The situation has been exacerbated by the growing tendency to include nuclear weapons in new security doctrines.

The Argentine Republic is willing to contribute to creating a common understanding of what is necessary in the field of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. We hope that, at the current session, all member States will share in that fundamental premise and that, with a bit of creativity, we will be able to identify immediate steps in order to finally achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

Please allow me to refer briefly to the second substantive item on the Commission's agenda, as representative of a country from one of the regions that has made the greatest progress in the implementation of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. As in the case of nuclear disarmament, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has been a pioneer in the implementation of such measures. We have witnessed the benefits in terms of safeguarding peace and consolidating democracy in the Americas by making possible greater transparency and dialogue among the hemisphere's countries.

The purpose of confidence-building measures is to reduce uncertainty and erroneous perceptions about the behaviour of States, thus reducing the risk of military confrontation. Keeping in mind that this concept is dynamic, its implementation and consolidation will not only make it possible to prevent

armed conflict but will also offer an effective tool to encourage greater integration in the political, economic and cultural spheres, through enhanced transparency and cooperation in the field of defence and security.

This dynamic concept also assumes that confidence-building measures vary according to the States implementing them. That is why we deem it crucial to communicate experiences carried out at the bilateral, subregional and regional levels, in order to contribute to the design of similar arrangements in other regions.

In that belief, since the fifty-ninth General Assembly session, Argentina has submitted a draft resolution whose objectives include strengthening the exchange of information on confidence-building measures. In implementation of Assembly resolution 59/92, which, along with its successors, was adopted by consensus and with an average of 100 Member States as sponsors, an electronic database has been established which facilitates regular updates on progress in the design and implementation of these measures worldwide. We hope that Member States will use this tool to bolster a mechanism for further transparency within the framework of the United Nations.

Allow me to conclude with a reference to my recent experience as Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on what I view as one of the most important mechanisms available to Member States with respect to confidence-building measures: the Register of Conventional Arms. Along with the United Nations System for the Standardized Reporting of Military Expenditures, the Register is a practical tool which enhances transparency on purchases of conventional weapons and makes it possible to identify potentially destabilizing situations.

At the most recent session of the Group of Experts we modified several categories of the Register in order to respond to technological innovations and new threats in the design and use of conventional weapons. We also moved forward in identifying transfers of small arms and light weapons for military use as a new priority. Although that does not constitute a category, States wishing to do so may submit information on such transfers through an additional standardized reporting instrument.

Although some insist on discrediting the usefulness of the Disarmament Commission, we consider that the current international security scenario gives us an opportunity to think about its rehabilitation. Although formulating innovative and creative recommendations will not be possible without the necessary political will, we believe that the Disarmament Commission is an appropriate forum, taking into account its deliberative nature, for holding an open dialogue that would help everyone better understand other national positions. It is our duty to continue believing in the existing disarmament bodies as tools to strengthen international peace and security and, in that way, to respond to the interests of our citizens.

Mrs. Asmady (Indonesia): Mr. Chairman, allow me first of all, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and to congratulate you on your unanimous election to preside over this year's session of the Disarmament Commission. We are confident that under your able guidance and leadership, the Commission will succeed at its 2007 session in fulfilling the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. NAM would also like to extend its felicitations to the other members of the Bureau and to the Chairs of the Working Groups on their election.

Let me avail myself of this opportunity to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his statement earlier as well as for his commitment to be more involved in disarmament and international security issues.

NAM underlines the importance for all States Members of the United Nations to reaffirm their full commitment to the purposes of the Charter and their obligation to strictly observe its principles as well as other relevant and generally accepted principles of international law.

It is true that the disarmament agenda has faced difficult times in the last few years. Disarmament machinery, of which this Commission is an important component, is no exception to that phenomenon. In this complex situation, the deliberative function of the Disarmament Commission is becoming increasingly important. In this regard, NAM reaffirms the importance of the Disarmament Commission as the specialized and deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery that allows for in-depth deliberations on specific disarmament issues, leading to the submission of concrete recommendations to the General Assembly.

NAM remains committed to the Commission's basic purposes and principles. But since the 2003 session of the Disarmament Commission, NAM has been very concerned that the Commission has been unable to play its role in meeting the challenges of the current global environment. Nevertheless, the Movement recognizes that the Commission has had very productive sessions, particularly in 1999, when it was able to reach consensus on guidelines for establishing nuclear-weapon-free-zones and for conventional arms control.

The work of the Disarmament Commission has greatly contributed to the emergence of global disarmament norms. Being strictly a deliberative forum, the Commission often encounters disagreements among its members over policies and priorities. NAM wishes the Chairs of the two Working Groups success in guiding their deliberations and calls upon States Members of the United Nations to display the political will and flexibility necessary to achieve agreement on recommendations, under the two substantive agenda items for the current cycle.

NAM emphasizes that progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all its aspects is essential to strengthening international peace and security, and the Movement appeals to all States to pursue and intensify multilateral negotiations, as agreed by consensus in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, with a view to achieving nuclear disarmament under effective international control and strengthening the international disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regimes.

With regard to the first substantive agenda item, entitled "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons", NAM reiterates its principled positions on nuclear disarmament and on the related issue of nuclear non-proliferation, which are fully reflected in the relevant documents adopted at its summits and ministerial meetings, including the fourteenth NAM Summit, held in Havana in September 2006. The Movement also believes that the vision and principles set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (General Assembly resolution S-10/2) remain relevant. The Movement also further reaffirms the need for all members of the Commission to fulfil their obligations in relation to arms control and disarmament and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects.

NAM reaffirms that, in the context of efforts to achieve the objective of nuclear disarmament, global and regional approaches and confidence-building measures complement each other and should, wherever possible, be pursued simultaneously so as to promote regional and international peace and security.

NAM reiterates that nuclear disarmament constitutes its primary disarmament objective and remains its highest priority. In this regard, NAM expresses its concern about the slow pace of progress towards nuclear disarmament, as well as about reversals in certain instances. In this context, the Movement underscores the need for the nuclear-weapon States to implement their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons and emphasizes, in this regard, the urgent need to commence negotiations without delay.

NAM believes that the efforts of the international community aimed at non-proliferation should be undertaken in parallel with simultaneous efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament. The Movement further believes that the most effective way of preventing terrorists from acquiring weapon of mass destruction is through the total elimination of such weapons. In this context, the Movement underlines that the threat of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction must be addressed within the framework of the United Nations and through international cooperation consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter and international law.

NAM calls upon all Member States to support international efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and urges all Member States to take or to strengthen national measures, as appropriate, to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery and materials and technologies related to their manufacture.

While noting the adoption of Security Council resolutions 1540 (2004) and 1673 (2006), NAM underlines the need to ensure that any action by the Council does not undermine the Charter or existing multilateral treaties on weapons of mass destruction, international organizations established in this regard, or the role of the General Assembly. NAM further cautions against the Security Council's continuing

practice of utilizing its authority to define legislative requirements for Member States in the implementation of Council decisions. In this regard, NAM stresses the importance of the issue of preventing non-State actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction being addressed in an inclusive manner by the General Assembly, taking into account the views of all members.

NAM also reiterates its long-standing principled position in support of the total elimination of nuclear testing, and expresses its concern about the lack of progress by the nuclear-weapon States in accomplishing the elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament, as well as the negative developments with regard to the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

NAM reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We reiterate our conviction that, pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, efforts aimed at the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument on security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States should be pursued as a matter of priority.

NAM again calls for the holding of an international conference at the earliest possible date with the objective of arriving at an agreement on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame to eliminate all nuclear weapons, prohibit their development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer and use or threat of use, and to provide for their destruction.

In this context, we reiterate the resolve expressed by heads of State or Government at the Millennium Summit, as contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2), to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, and to keep all options open for achieving that aim, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways and means of eliminating nuclear dangers.

NAM continues to consider the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zones created by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Bangkok, Pelindaba and Semipalatinsk to be a positive step towards attaining the objective of nuclear disarmament. NAM welcomes the efforts aimed at establishing new nuclear-weapon-free zones in all regions of the world on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned, and calls for cooperation and broad consultations in order to achieve that goal.

NAM reiterates its support for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and to this end it reaffirms the need for the speedy establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, in accordance with Security Council resolution 487 (1981) and relevant General Assembly resolutions adopted by consensus.

The NAM States parties recall that the 2000 NPT Review Conference reaffirmed the importance of Israel's acceding to the NPT and placing its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in realizing the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty in the Middle East.

The NAM States parties to the NPT remain fully convinced that the NPT is a key instrument in the effort to halt the vertical and horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons and is the essential foundation for nuclear disarmament. The States parties to the NPT should work towards a fair balance between mutual obligations and responsibilities under the Treaty, with a view to achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The NAM States parties to the NPT call for the full implementation of, and the firm commitment by all States parties to, the package agreed to at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, which comprises the decision on strengthening the review process for the Treaty, the decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the decision on the extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the resolution on the Middle East, as well as the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, in particular the 13 practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to implement article VI of the Treaty.

With regard to the second substantive agenda item, NAM supports practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms as a way to strengthen international peace and security. The Movement recognizes that, since the Second World

War, millions have lost their lives in numerous conflicts fought with conventional weapons, and current trends do not give us any reason to believe that there will be a decrease in the incidence or severity of such conflicts. Hence the situation with regard to conventional arms is a source of increasing concern.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that confidence-building measures are neither a substitute nor a precondition for disarmament measures. Yet their potential for creating an atmosphere conducive to arms control and disarmament has been demonstrated in various parts of the world. NAM further believes that if an unbalanced and incomplete approach is taken, especially in some regions of the world, the desired results in terms of building confidence will not be achieved.

NAM also believes that confidence-building measures, especially when applied in a comprehensive manner, can be conducive to achieving security structures that are based on cooperation and openness and thus contribute to the wider objective of the renunciation of the threat or use of force. The implementation of guidelines for appropriate types of confidence-building measures for all States is of significance, as it takes fully into account the specific political, military and other conditions prevailing in a region.

NAM expresses its firm support for the unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures adopted by some Governments aimed at reducing their military expenditures, thereby contributing to strengthening regional and international peace and security. We recognize that confidence-building measures are helpful in that regard.

With respect to the second substantive agenda item, NAM welcomes the working paper distributed by the Chairman of Working Group II and is ready to engage constructively in the Working Group's deliberations.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the Non-Aligned Movement wishes to reiterate its readiness to cooperate with you, the Bureau and the Chairs of the Working Group for the success of the 2007 session of the Disarmament Commission. We also look forward to working actively and constructively with all members of the Commission with a view to reaching consensus for substantive recommendations on the two agenda items under consideration.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil): I wish to extend to you, Ambassador Elbio Rosselli, warm congratulations on your election. For myself and for my delegation, it is especially gratifying to have as Chairman of this Commission the Permanent Representative of Uruguay, one of Brazil's MERCOSUR partner countries. You can count on our delegation's full cooperation in your efforts to ensure a fruitful session.

I wish also to fully endorse the statement delivered by the representative of the Dominican Republic on behalf of the Rio Group. I will make a few comments in addition to that statement.

The issues before the Commission are both sensitive and complex, as they pertain to security, one of the essential prerogatives of States. The Commission has a unique role to play in discussing future options for disarmament. It should be in no one's interest for the Disarmament Commission to be seen as failing in that mandate. Achieving positive and substantial results in the Commission is even more important in view of the lack of tangible progress in other disarmament forums.

As is well known, the Disarmament Commission is a deliberative forum with universal participation dedicated to the long-term discussion of disarmament issues, with a view to the submission of concrete recommendations to the General Assembly. It is not a body that negotiates legally binding agreements; that is the responsibility of the Conference on Disarmament. It therefore does not operate under the constraints that characterize such negotiations. Its location within the scope of the General Assembly implies that it is the right place to hold thematic discussions on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. That is, in our view, particularly relevant, especially in the context of recurrent Security Council encroachment on General Assembly competences related to international peace and security.

In 2006, the Commission was able to overcome the difficulties that prevented substantive discussions from taking place in the two previous years. We are now beginning the second year of a three-year cycle and should strive to achieve as much progress as possible with a view to reaching meaningful and generally agreed outcomes at the end of this period.

This year's substantive work will continue to be entrusted to two working groups with diverse responsibilities. The issues we will have to address at

that level are distinct in nature and scope. Progress should be made in all areas, yet we should not allow advances in one to be made contingent upon parallel progress in the other.

Working Group I, on "Ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament", will carry on its discussions in an international environment that continues to be marked by deadlocks, imbalances and distorted approaches. The growing emphasis on strengthening non-proliferation mechanisms has not, regrettably, been accompanied by parallel efforts in terms of disarmament and enhancement of international cooperation for the development of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Moreover, certain trends are particularly worrisome. Seeking new rationales for maintaining or developing new, more sophisticated nuclear weapons is a disturbing development that must be reversed. Attempting to limit or otherwise reinterpret the right to development, research and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes recognized in article IV of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is unacceptable.

Our deliberations will take place right before the start of the next NPT review process. Consultations among interested parties are under way. We hope that there will be a smooth start and a good substantive basis for the next Review Conference. The strength, credibility and endurance of the NPT rests on a fundamental trade-off that must be recognized and upheld for the Treaty to be effective and lasting by virtue of its own merits. Consensus at the review process will depend primarily on the ability to keep the Treaty not only alive but also functional.

It is all the more relevant that Working Group I seriously engage in debate on its subject matter and advance in the formulation of a substantive document. The three weeks ahead are an opportunity for an updated exchange of views on these issues.

Mr. Chairman, my Government deeply appreciates the confidence that you and the Commission expressed in endorsing a Brazilian official, Mr. Carlos Duarte, to continue to chair Working Group II, charged with confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. I wish to highlight the fact that the work done in the Working Group last year left us with a text that we believe can form the basis for further discussion, with a view to reaching consensus at a later stage for making concrete recommendations to the General Assembly on the issue.

By definition, confidence-building measures are a valuable instrument for generating trust. Their implementation has a positive impact in the consolidation of a more cooperative environment, essential to the full development of existing potential at the national and regional levels. Brazilian bilateral, regional and multilateral experience in this field confirms this evaluation. We encourage delegations to approach the upcoming discussions in an open spirit, so that all States can derive greater benefit from confidence-building measures.

The vast challenges confronting the Disarmament Commission call for a deeper sense of responsibility and commitment to uphold the integrity of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Disturbing as they may be, today's challenges must not divert us from the pursuit of disarmament and non-proliferation within the framework of the United Nations. The Disarmament Commission is the agreed forum for this essential exercise and has, in our view, a key role to play. Let us all work together and make full and productive use of this deliberative forum to strengthen international cooperation and action in disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Cheng Jingye (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. Chairman, allow me at the outset, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, to congratulate you on your assumption of the chairmanship of this session of the Disarmament Commission. I am convinced that, given your experience and capabilities, you will guide this session to a positive outcome. The Chinese delegation will fully cooperate with you and the Chairpersons of the two Working Groups as well as with other delegations. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Joon Oh, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea. In addition, I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

In the past year the international security situation has undergone complex and profound changes. On the whole, the multilateral arms control process still lacks vitality. Regional nuclear issues remain prominent, and related diplomatic efforts have been characterized by twists and turns. The international non-proliferation regime is encountering

severe challenges. However, it is the common aspiration of the international community to seek peace and promote development through international arms control and non-proliferation. Active efforts are being made to explore new ways and means to promote international arms control and the disarmament and non-proliferation processes. We have every reason to believe that, with the good-faith cooperation of all countries, we will certainly succeed in these efforts. It is also our sincere hope that, through in-depth discussions by all parties, the potential of the Disarmament Commission will be fully tapped, enabling it to play its rightful role.

Nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is an important item on the agenda of the current three-year cycle of the Commission's deliberations. China believes that the two issues have always complemented and promoted one another. There would be no point in attempting to determine which has a higher priority. Promoting the nuclear disarmament process contributes to international nuclear non-proliferation efforts, and enhancing nuclear non-proliferation is, in turn, conducive to achieving sustainable progress in the area of nuclear disarmament.

The Chinese delegation has already elaborated on its positions, proposals and policies on nuclear issues, and it submitted the relevant working papers during the previous session of the Commission. I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate the following points.

First, the elimination of nuclear weapons and the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons is the common objective of the international community. China has always advocated the complete prohibition and total destruction of nuclear weapons, with the aim of ridding the world of the threats of nuclear war and nuclear weapons. The two countries with the largest nuclear arsenals should assume their special and primary responsibility in the area of nuclear disarmament and take the lead in further reducing substantially their nuclear arsenals.

Secondly, complete nuclear disarmament cannot be accomplished overnight. Rather, it should be achieved through systematic, gradual and specific measures in a balanced and stable international strategic security environment. Nuclear-weapon States should renounce the doctrine of the first use of nuclear weapons, unconditionally undertake not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States or nuclear-weapon-free zones, and conclude the relevant international legal instruments. China supports the substantive work done by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on nuclear disarmament, security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States, the fissile material cut-off treaty and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as soon as possible, on a comprehensive and balanced basis.

Thirdly, as a nuclear-weapon State, China has never shirked its responsibilities in the area of nuclear disarmament under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). China has consistently exercised the utmost restraint in the development of nuclear weapons and in terms of their size. It has never participated in any nuclear arms race, nor will it do so in future. China has always pursued a policy of non-first-use of nuclear weapons at all times and in all circumstances, and it unconditionally undertakes not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States or nuclear-weapon-free zones. This policy, unique among nuclear-weapon States, fully demonstrates China's responsible attitude and firm dedication to safeguarding world peace and stability. China will not change this policy in future.

Ensuring the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is a very important and urgent task confronting the international community. It bears on regional and global peace and stability as well as on the development and success of the international non-proliferation mechanism. China maintains that the following principles should be observed in the process of addressing and resolving the issue of nuclear non-proliferation.

First, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons should be addressed in a comprehensive way that deals with both its symptoms and root causes. While pursuing a new security concept based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation, countries should respect one another's security interests, promote common security and create a favourable international security environment, so as to create the necessary conditions for achieving the objective of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Secondly, the countries concerned should, on the basis of consultations conducted on an equal footing and in conditions of mutual respect, commit themselves to enhancing dialogue, building confidence

and normalizing their relations. That would greatly contribute to realizing the goal of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and of maintaining and promoting peace and stability.

Thirdly, a resolute approach should be taken that focuses on dialogue and negotiations. Problems cannot be fundamentally resolved through the use of embargoes or by applying pressure; they should be resolved through cooperation rather than confrontation. The use or threat of force should be avoided. It should be emphasized that relevant international efforts should not deviate from the fundamental objective of maintaining and promoting global and regional peace and stability.

Fourthly, impartiality and non-discrimination should be ensured in the promotion of international nuclear non-proliferation efforts, and the relationship between non-proliferation and the peaceful use of science and technology should be appropriately addressed in a balanced way. The legitimate rights of all countries to such peaceful use should be scrupulously guaranteed. At the same time, proliferation activities by any country under the pretext of peaceful use should be prohibited.

Fifthly, effective measures should be taken to safeguard and strengthen the international legal regime governing nuclear non-proliferation. The international community should, through broad-based discussions, advance with the times and build greater consensus so as to consolidate and reinforce the relevant multilateral mechanisms. In the current situation, it is particularly important to safeguard this regime, especially the authority and effectiveness of the NPT.

As a permanent member of the Security Council and a member of the international community, China continues to make unremitting efforts aimed at peacefully resolving the relevant regional nuclear issues.

Concerning the Korean peninsula nuclear issue, the Chinese Government is committed to achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and safeguarding peace and stability on the peninsula and in North-East Asia. China has always advocated a peaceful solution to the issue through diplomatic means and has made great efforts to that end, which have contributed to the convening of the six-party talks and the conclusion of the Joint Statement in September 2005. Since the nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, China has actively used its good offices to bring the issue back to the track of the six-party talks. The parties involved agreed on the initial actions for the implementation of the joint statement, which established five working groups, including the working group on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Discussions have been carried out on the implementation of the initial actions and the action plan for the next phase. China is ready to maintain contact and coordination with other parties to promote constant progress in the six-party talks and to make constructive efforts to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and maintain peace and stability on the peninsula and in North-East Asia.

On the Iranian nuclear issue, China is in favour of preserving the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and opposes the proliferation of nuclear weapons. China supports efforts to resolve the issue peacefully and to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. Meanwhile, under the precondition of the strict implementation of international non-proliferation obligations, the legitimate rights of relevant countries to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy should be respected. Diplomatic negotiation is the best way to solve the Iranian nuclear issue and serves the interests of all parties. To solve the problem, both political will and diplomatic wisdom are needed. China hopes that all parties involved will remain patient and restrained and continue to move in the direction of a peaceful solution. The current priority is to intensify diplomatic efforts and resume dialogue and negotiation as soon as possible.

"Feasible confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons" is another important item on the agenda of the current cycle of deliberations. At the last session, fruitful discussions were conducted on the general approach and principles of confidence-building measures. China hopes that all parties will, in the spirit of seeking common ground while setting their differences aside and accommodating each other's concerns, try to achieve certain results in the current cycle of deliberations.

I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, the purpose of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons is to promote trust, reduce misunderstanding, prevent conflict and maintain stability. Secondly, the

precondition and basis of any confidence-building measure is the improvement of the international environment, the preservation of international strategic balance, and ensuring undiminished security for all countries. Thirdly, different measures should be adopted in the light of the situations of different regions and time. States and regions should develop confidence-building measures on an independent and voluntary basis and in a step-by-step manner.

China attaches great importance to and actively promotes regional disarmament and feasible confidence-building measures. China is actively exploring potential confidence-building measures with relevant countries in such frameworks as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, as well as on a bilateral basis. Those efforts contribute to promoting regional peace and stability and are conducive to further exploration by the international community in that field. We are willing to work with the international community on the basis of the aforementioned principles with a view to further promoting relevant efforts towards confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Cuban delegation, allow me to commend you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. We are very pleased to see a representative from Uruguay, a brotherly Latin American country, at the helm of our work. We wish to extend our congratulations to the other Bureau officers.

My delegation would like to express its full support for the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, which reflects the principled positions and priorities on disarmament matters adopted at the Movement's summit conference, held last year in Havana.

This session is taking place shortly after the General Assembly's adoption of a resolution on strengthening the capacity of the Organization to advance the disarmament agenda, based on proposals submitted by the Secretary-General. We are confident that the new resolution will contribute to further strengthening the central role that the United Nations should play in the disarmament field.

At the present time, the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) are getting ready for the Preparatory Committee meeting for the Review Conference of the Treaty, to be held next month in Vienna, and we are receiving some optimistic signals from Geneva about the possibility that the Conference on Disarmament will be able to begin substantive work.

For its part, the Disarmament Commission is entering the second year of its cycle of deliberations on two highly relevant issues. We now have the responsibility to take concrete steps forward. Reaching definitive agreements next year will depend to a large extent on what we are able to accomplish at this session.

Notwithstanding the proclaimed end of the cold war, there are 32,300 nuclear weapons in the world, over 12,000 of which are ready to be employed immediately. Nuclear weapons modernization programmes have not stopped. The mere existence of nuclear weapons and the doctrines that prescribe their possession and use represent a threat to international peace and security. That is why Cuba reaffirms the Non-Aligned Movement's historic position that nuclear disarmament is and must continue to be the highest priority in the field of disarmament.

The nuclear-weapon States have a legal obligation not only to pursue, but also to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects, under strict and effective international verification. Cuba opposes the intentions of some who seek to ignore or minimize the relevance of nuclear disarmament and to impose a selective non-proliferation approach, by virtue of which the problem lies not in the very existence of nuclear weapons, but in the "good" or "bad" behaviour of those who have them.

There can be no selective implementation of the NPT. The obligations related to nuclear disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy cannot continue to be disregarded in the context of the Treaty. We strongly uphold respect for States' inalienable right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, under strict observance of the commitments incurred under the NPT. Similarly, we support the priority conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument on security guarantees for the non-nuclear States.

We appreciate the efforts of Mr. Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou of Benin, Chairman of Working Group I, responsible for the agenda item "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons". We consider especially useful the open consultations that he convened during the intersessional period.

Moreover, I must say in all honesty that we are concerned about the scant interest shown last year by some delegations — fortunately a minority — in achieving concrete advances in Working Group I. We sincerely hope that our perception was false and that we shall all show the necessary political will to advance at this session.

While we are open to considering other options, in general Cuba regards the structure proposed in the last working paper of the Chair of Group I to be suitable, particularly the idea of having a section on general principles and another on recommendations. Ours is not a mandate to carry out academic discussions, regardless of how useful they may be, but to produce concrete recommendations on how to advance towards nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

With regard to the item "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms", we reiterate that Cuba supports such measures as a way to strengthen international peace and security. They should be in full consonance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. Due to their voluntary nature, confidence-building measures should not be imposed. The consensus of the States participating in the process is a basic condition for its success. There is no single recipe. In order to be effective, confidence-building measures should respond to the specific situations of the country or region in question.

In Cuba's opinion, the ever-increasing world military expenditure, which has already exceeded $1 trillion per year, is a factor that in itself creates a climate of distrust and is a legitimate international concern. One single country spends as much on arms as the rest of the world combined.

These are realities that we must tackle with urgent action. As a practical initiative which, besides its obvious usefulness, could be of great value as a confidence-building measure, Cuba proposes the establishment of a United Nations-managed fund, to which at least half of current military expenditures would be allocated, in order to address the economic and social development needs of the countries of the third world.

We consider that the most recent working document submitted by the Chairman of Working Group II is an excellent basis on which to continue this year's discussions. We wish the fraternal delegation of Brazil, in particular Mr. Carlos Duarte, great success in the chairmanship of the Group.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by reiterating Cuba's full support to you in the discharge of your work.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission gives me the pleasant opportunity to extend to you, Sir, the heartiest congratulations of the Algerian delegation and to assure you and the other members of the Bureau that we are at your complete disposal in working towards the success of this session of the Commission. I should like to take this opportunity also to welcome the commendable efforts accomplished by the Chairman of the two Working Groups throughout the previous session and to wish them every success in the furtherance of their mission.

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Indonesia on behalf of countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Last year, the Algerian delegation welcomed the consensus that prevailed at the outset of this new three-year cycle in the Disarmament Commission's work. At that time, it expressed the hope that that leap forward by the international community would enable this important United Nations body to rediscover its role and finally re-engage in substantive debate in a sphere that is vital for international peace and security.

However, we are obliged to note that the outcome of the first part of its work was a discouraging, even a frustrating time for my delegation, as it was for all those whose devotion and commitment to the cause of disarmament are now sorely tested by the risks related to the development of a new generation of weapons and the growing threats of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The failure of the previous session of the Disarmament Commission came on top of a series of negative developments that had a strong impact on the

nuclear disarmament process which had already been strained by the deadlock in the multilateral disarmament exercise in general and by the lethargy of the Conference on Disarmament in particular.

Nevertheless, these difficulties should in no way affect our strong conviction that today, more than ever, we need to engage in negotiation and collaboration with a view to achieving disarmament and thus fostering an era of global peace and security. The fulfilment of this fervent desire is within our reach as long as States show political will and take joint measures to restart the debate on disarmament in all its aspects.

From that standpoint, the Disarmament Commission, whose efficiency has withstood the test of time, remains eminently relevant and continues to be the ideal multilateral forum for cooperation and dialogue with a view to coming up with proposals and recommendations to consolidate existing achievements and contribute to the international community's efforts to restart the disarmament process and establish the basis for a new era of peace and security.

It is in this constructive spirit, a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, with the aim of establishing genuine collective security that my delegation would like to express its will to contribute to the success of Commission's work and to reach a consensus on the two substantive items on its agenda.

The discussions and the comments engendered last year by the item on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons demonstrated once again to what extent the hopes born of the climate of détente at the end of the cold war and the important decisions jointly taken during the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) were diminishing in an international context that was becoming increasingly worrying for international peace and security.

Hence, it is of the greatest importance that the objectives of general and complete disarmament regain their full significance and relevance. The realization of these objectives should form part of a process firmly based on strict compliance with the principles set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (General Assembly resolution S-10/2) and the priorities that document established, among which nuclear disarmament is the absolute priority.

In this regard, we remain convinced that the realization of the objectives of nuclear disarmament are inevitably rooted in the universality of the NPT, the implementation of undertakings unambiguously assumed by nuclear States at the sixth NPT Review Conference, and a definitive break with an order based on the doctrine of deterrence and military supremacy. This approach should be actively undertaken through re-energizing the Conference on Disarmament, the sole forum for multilateral negotiation in the sphere of disarmament and capable of drawing up a programme of work that will make possible the start of negotiations on the development of binding legal instruments relating in particular to nuclear disarmament and nuclear weapon non-use guarantees.

It is also worth recalling that the NPT remains the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime in both its horizontal and its vertical dimensions. Strict, non-selective compliance and implementation of undertakings in this regard should be accompanied by common international efforts to promote technological cooperation and scientific exchange, in order to ensure that all States have the possibility of using atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

It is with this in mind that the African countries recently reiterated their commitment to the inalienable right to free access to nuclear energy and nuclear technology for peaceful development purposes, at the High-level African Regional Conference on the Contribution of Nuclear Energy to Peace and Sustainable Development, which met in Algiers on 9 and 10 January.

On the important item on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, we hope this year to see a consensus emerge on fundamental aspects of this question, and we hope for results that take into account the concerns of all delegations. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that confidence-building measures, whose ultimate aim is to create conditions for peaceful coexistence and to improve international relations based on cooperation and solidarity, would be greatly strengthened by a restatement of respect for the universal principles enunciated in the Charter of the United Nations, namely, the right to self-defence, non-recourse to force or the threat of force against the territorial integrity of

States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, peaceful settlement of disputes, the sovereign equality of States and the right of peoples to self-determination.

Moreover, when it comes to confidence-building measures, any steps taken should be global in nature, in order to strengthen peace and security, promote arms limitation and contribute to both conventional and nuclear disarmament. Such steps should, above all, avoid a selective approach that singles out conventional weapons as the only area for which confidence-building measures are needed.

Finally, I should like to repeat our hope that the Disarmament Commission will continue to serve as a productive and fruitful forum for exchanges and that each of us will find that our legitimate expectations are met in its recommendations.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): I wish to express, on behalf of my delegation, my congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the chair at the current session. I also welcome the other members of the Bureau and wish you all a great deal of wisdom and calm in carrying out the work. I especially wish to reassure you of the cooperation of my delegation, which will spare no effort to contribute as well as it can to our session.

After the difficulties that the Commission experienced in 2004 and 2005, we were very pleased that it managed to develop a new agenda to renew its work in 2006. Though it is true that the work in 2006 did not meet our expectations, the exchanges during that session nonetheless made it possible to raise crucial matters to be developed further in the framework of our deliberations in the course of this second annual session of our three-year cycle, which begin in 2006.

Benin aligns itself with the statement by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Countries.

Despite the very difficult situation prevailing in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation, we must tackle this session of the Disarmament Commission with optimism and resolve. The Commission has a crucial role to play. As a deliberative body, its duty is to serve as a crucible for a new consensus regarding the paths to be followed and the means to be implemented to take up the challenges that our modern world faces in this area.

Through my voice, Benin urges all Member States to begin a thorough and honest discussion on the outstanding issues in a spirit of frank cooperation and with a view to seeking mutual advantage. We should restore to multilateralism all its meaning and its full dimension, and we should strive to regain trust in its ability to help Member States to find the proper answers to their legitimate security needs without that giving rise to an unbridled arms race, to proliferation of nuclear weapons whose very existence would be a serious threat to present and future generations. Those weapons are a threat to international peace and security. Many authoritative voices have spoken recently to inform the international community of the seriousness of the current situation, which includes real challenges such as the trends towards a resurgence of cold-war reflexes, State proliferation and the possibility of acquisition of nuclear weapons by non-State actors, in particular terrorist organizations.

That is why it is urgent that the Commission be able to make considerable progress in developing recommendations to reach the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, in particular. The complete elimination of those weapons is a cardinal requirement of our time. My country repeats this here in order to remind the nuclear Powers of the commitments they have made in various contexts to stop production and to begin to destroy their stockpiles. In that respect, we cannot stress enough the intrinsic link between disarmament and non-proliferation and the need to bring to the fore the search for a way to overcome the impasse in which the international community finds itself.

The path to be followed is undoubtedly the promotion of the universality of the multilateral treaties and international conventions concluded in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. We can achieve that through cooperation in the area of security and by taking into account the legitimate security needs of States. In that regard, Benin reaffirms its attachment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, as well as to treaties for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

The agreements resulting from the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences of States Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty should be implemented in a consistent fashion, in particular the concrete measures to guide the action of the international community for a

world free of nuclear weapons, especially with respect to the application of article VI of the Treaty.

My delegation would like to reaffirm its full support for Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and calls for suitable assistance for developing countries in order to ensure its full application. We are pleased as well by the entry into force of the treaty signed in 2002 between the United States and the Russian Federation. Along the same lines, the existing international instruments should be complemented by an international treaty dealing with the negative assurances to be given to non-nuclear-weapon States by the Powers that do posses them. In this framework, they must pledge not to use or threaten to use those weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

If we are to remain faithful to the common objective of the gradual and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons, we can only categorically reject any justification for the acceptability of using nuclear weapons and the efforts in recent years to perfect and modernize nuclear arsenals, as well as the continuation of programmes to foster their proliferation.

The swift conclusion of a treaty on fissile material would be a great contribution to the international community's efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Conference on Disarmament would gain a great deal of credibility if it managed to do that. The question of verification should be reviewed with the full attention that it warrants. The scientific community is called upon to seek ways and means to ensure that it can continue to contribute to strengthening international stability and security.

We urgently appeal to the nuclear Powers to take appropriate coordinated measures to prevent the accidental use of nuclear weapons. Here, we reaffirm the appeal launched at Hiroshima by Mayors for Peace to put an end to the targeting of cities with nuclear weapons. In the same vein, we are deeply concerned about strategies envisaging the advance deployment of new nuclear weapons, which can only rekindle the confrontations of the cold war.

Preventing the militarization of outer space is an essential component of disarmament. In this respect, the recent rejection of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty bodes ill and risks setting off a new arms race in outer space. That is why it is important to ensure the effective implementation of existing arms control and disarmament agreements with respect to outer space. Similarly, the Conference on Disarmament should urgently negotiate an international instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space. Outer space should be used for the benefit of humankind, not to its detriment.

My country is fully aware of the commitments undertaken by the non-nuclear-weapon States under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and reaffirms its commitment to the obligations stemming from the Treaty. At the same time, we reaffirm here the right of developing countries to have non-discriminatory access to all uses of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Benin associates itself with the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the ministerial-level African Regional Conference on nuclear energy, held in Algiers on 9 and 10 January — recalled earlier by the Permanent Representative of Algeria — and endorsed by the Executive Council of the African Union at its tenth ordinary session, held in Addis Ababa on 25 and 26 January.

In that Declaration, African ministers of energy pledged to strengthen security measures and nuclear safeguards within the framework of a comprehensive approach aimed at promoting the safe and responsible use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, taking into account requirements in the area of non-proliferation. Here, we would like to point out that Africa focuses its action within the framework of cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose Director General attended the Conference. The Agency remains the only competent authority for verifying compliance by member States with their security guarantees from the legal perspective and in terms of voluntary confidence-building measures.

Voluntary measures are extremely important given the current climate of suspicion that has developed in the international arena regarding the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. There are objective circumstances that foster that climate of mistrust, including the dual-use character of nuclear technology. Given that situation, closer international cooperation with a view to greater economic integration would be very useful in restoring trust in that area.

While on the subject of confidence-building measures, I would like to focus on the second substantive item on the agenda. Confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons are of

crucial importance for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Charter has established a solid basis for the maintenance of good relations among Member States by establishing clear principles and rules of conduct that have been tested in practice.

We welcome the fact that the September 2005 World Summit reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to the Charter as the foundation of international relations and provided a concerted response to the new threats and challenges at the dawn of the new millennium. We must promote an integrated vision of confidence-building measures, taking into account the varying perceptions of States as regards threats and security challenges, so as to strengthen international peace on the basis of a security balance.

In this respect, we should strengthen the authority of the rule of law at the national and international levels. We must also constantly work to improve the future prospects for all Member States within the framework of international cooperation that is driven by active solidarity, mutual advantage and mutual respect.

With regard to relations among armies, my country has worked to promote friendly relations at the regional level through measures to foster continued good-neighbourliness. In order to strengthen confidence at the bilateral and regional levels, we must ensure that military expenditures are limited to what is strictly necessary to meet legitimate security needs with a view to contributing to international efforts to strengthen stability in various regions of the world and to counter the threat to human security, understood as a new consensual contract of solidarity between the citizen and the State and among States at the regional and global levels.

The international community has a duty to ensure that there is constant improvement in the effectiveness of mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and for conflict prevention at various levels, and to strengthen global governance by optimizing the operation of structures and bodies that assist in this area. In this context, we must make an effort to rationalize the international system to make it more equitable and ensure that it offers a framework for the development of all peoples. To that end, we must better exploit the opportunities provided by globalization and manage the challenges that it poses.

Making the international system more equitable also requires more sustained efforts to ensure proper financing for development with a view to eliminating poverty, overcoming pandemic disease and limiting climate change, whose consequences could lead to significantly increased demand for conventional weapons. We must also strive for success in our efforts to put an end to long-standing conflicts, which have a negative impact on international relations. We must also promote the legitimate exploitation and trade in high-value raw materials so as to enable the peoples of producer countries to benefit from them.

We must also halt the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. For developing countries, such arms cause damage comparable to that which could be done by weapons of mass destruction. We need stricter controls on the transfer of such arms, and we must spare no effort to ensure the adoption of an international conventional on the arms trade.

Although it is true that confidence-building measures cannot replace disarmament and non-proliferation measures, they can help foster a climate conducive to significant progress in those two areas. That is why we must give them equal attention.

These are simply a few thoughts that I wanted to share with the Commission at the beginning of its annual session. I should like to reiterate my delegation's support for the Chairmen of the two Working Groups, in the hope that their discussions in the course of this session will lead to substantive outcomes that will meet the challenges facing us as well as our expectations.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I am especially pleased now to give the floor to Ambassador Oh Joon, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea — my predecessor in this Chair — whose efforts last year resulted in a great deal of progress in the Commission's work.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): First of all, Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my warmest congratulations on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission for this year. I am confident that under your leadership the Commission will indeed take meaningful steps towards a successful outcome. My delegation as a whole, and I personally, as Chairman of the previous session, will spare no effort to make progress towards that end.

It has become customary at meetings such as this to note the many setbacks that have befallen the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation machinery in recent years. But what truly matters is not the setbacks themselves so much as their consequences. The accumulated failures of major negotiations have weakened confidence in the usefulness of multilateralism in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. There is a temptation to fall into fatalism. That temptation must be resisted. To give up hope is to acquiesce to the gravest of threats to international peace and security. My delegation firmly believes that the Commission can play a role in reversing the current trend and in getting us back on track.

A good start was made last year, during the first year of the Commission's current three-year cycle. Although it took us years to agree on the agenda for last year's substantive session, we were finally able to return to the table, restart the two Working Groups and forge a consensus on measures to improve the Commission's working methods. Although these may have been relatively modest achievements, they represented a step forward from the stasis of prior years, paving the way for more substantive work this year.

In that regard, I note that when this session comes to a close later this month, a new review cycle of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will follow almost immediately. The Commission can contribute to that subsequent effort by agreeing on recommendations for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which could then become useful reference points during the NPT review process.

To break the current impasse in the NPT regime, we must forgo the notion that each party can wait to fulfil its obligations until someone else moves first. Cooperation is crucial, but so is action. In my own country, we have enjoyed the peaceful use of nuclear technology for three decades. Today, our 20 nuclear power plants provide more than 40 per cent of our supply of electricity. Despite our growing need for a peaceful nuclear fuel cycle, we signed the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1992, voluntarily renouncing nuclear enrichment or reprocessing facilities on our soil.

In the same spirit, we encourage all Member States to do their part. We urge those NPT States parties with nuclear weapons faithfully to implement their obligations under article VI of the Treaty. States that remain outside the NPT should accede to the Treaty at an early date.

To address the challenge of nuclear proliferation more effectively, we should strive to achieve universal adoption of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Additional Protocol, which would enhance global confidence in the NPT system by bolstering its monitoring and verification capabilities. Parallel efforts should be made to strengthen existing export control regimes and measures to secure nuclear materials and sensitive technologies so that they do not fall into the wrong hands.

In particular, the international community should make a concerted effort to cope with illicit brokering activities, which are a growing contemporary threat, as revealed through the unravelling of the A.Q. Khan network. As part of that effort, the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Australian Government co-hosted an international seminar on brokering controls in Seoul last month. The meeting provided a timely opportunity to take stock of national and international responses to the proliferation threat posed by illicit brokering activities. Momentum is building for the formation of an international consensus on the strengthening of brokering controls.

Conventional weapons pose a destructive threat no less serious than that posed by weapons of mass destruction. The unrestrained proliferation of conventional weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, not only fuels and exacerbates conflicts but also hampers socio-economic and human development. In that regard, my delegation believes that the United Nations should play a greater role in the control of conventional weapons. My delegation hopes that, through our deliberations during this substantive session, the Commission will be able to agree on an appropriate and comprehensive set of recommendations and further confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. Such measures would address both new and traditional challenges.

My delegation's view is that practical confidence-building measures should begin in areas where progress can more easily be achieved, then move to more difficult areas. As trust cannot be built overnight, we need to remain patient with this step-by-step

approach. At the same time, we must be careful not to use lack of progress on the most controversial issues as an excuse for inaction in other areas.

The approach of the Republic of Korea to the promotion of inter-Korean reconciliation is based on that principle. We believe that mutual confidence and trust are being enhanced through projects such as the reconnection of railroads and highways across the demilitarized zone, the facilitation of tourism to Mt. Gumgang, the development of the Gaesong industrial complex, and the reunion of separated families. In our view, the increased confidence built by these cooperative efforts will lead to the ultimate resolution of many pending security issues between the two Koreas.

Let me conclude by underlining our belief that the current stalemate in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation can be broken only by political commitment accompanied by real action. States will make a stronger commitment and take substantive action if they embrace an open-minded and visionary approach to the concept of national interest. We cannot make effective progress towards solving the problems of proliferation by sticking to our own narrow national or even regional self-interests. We can delay only so long; eventually these global problems will reach our doorsteps, undermining stability in our own countries. The only way forward, therefore, is to pursue enlightened national interest, recognizing that, in the long run, it is only on the basis of mutual interest and cooperation that we can serve our own best interests.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.